

Digital Families and the Threat of Online Gambling: Legal Challenges in Protecting Children in Indonesia

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Abstract

Online gambling has created new forms of rifts in the family structure that occur silently but have a wide impact, especially on children. The fragmentation of relationships in digital households disrupts parenting functions and creates vulnerable psychosocial conditions for children in the domestic environment. Unfortunately, the child protection system in Indonesia lacks a mechanism to respond to indirect threats arising from the dynamics of cyberspace within the family. This study aims to critically examine the limitations of the legal and social systems in protecting children from family disintegration due to online gambling. The study employed a qualitative approach, drawing on library research and the analysis of relevant literature and secondary data. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach to uncover regulatory and social gaps that have not been able to anticipate structural damage in digital families. The results of the study show that existing regulations are still partial, and sectoral, and fail to touch on the complexity of families exposed to destructive digital practices. Child protection has not integrated new risk indicators that arise from uncontrolled online environments. A redesign of the child protection system is needed to be more inclusive, multisectoral, and adaptive to the challenges of digital families so that the best interests of children can be guaranteed comprehensively.

Keywords: *Disintegration, Online Gambling, Child Protection.*



A. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the phenomenon of online gambling has increasingly emerged as a significant social threat permeating various strata of Indonesian society. The proliferation of internet access, widespread ownership of digital devices, and insufficient regulatory oversight of online platforms have collectively created conducive conditions for gambling practices that affect not only adults but also destabilize family structures (Dwihayuni & Fauzi, 2021). Within technologically saturated households, online gambling has transcended the boundaries of individual legal infractions, often acting as a catalyst for familial discord (Arifina, Yusnadi, & Machmud, 2024). When a family member frequently a parent engages in digital gambling, the emotional resilience, economic stability, and social cohesion of the family unit become jeopardized, frequently leading to financial distress, interpersonal conflict, and reduced parental engagement (Dwihayuni & Fauzi, 2021; Arifina et al., 2024). Children in these environments become invisible victims, facing psychological neglect, social marginalization, and deprivation of a safe developmental space (Usada & Akbar, 2024).

Changes in interaction patterns within families due to digital connectivity cannot be separated from subtle processes of social disintegration that frequently

occur unnoticed. Excessive online activities, including digital gambling, redirect parental priorities from nurturing and supervising children toward fulfilling addictive and consumptive personal desires (Vuchkovski et al., 2023; Russell et al., 2021). Empirical studies indicate that financial pressures arising from gambling-related losses contribute to heightened domestic conflict, child neglect, intimate partner violence, and even divorce (Hing et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022). These strains often degrade children's quality of life, restricting access to adequate education and healthcare while imposing long-term psychological burdens (Saunders & Brown, 2023). The complexity is further compounded by legal frameworks that have yet to fully address the evolving dynamics of digitally mediated families and their novel risk patterns (Hing et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2021).

Recent data shows that children's involvement in online gambling activities in Indonesia is substantial and alarming. According to a report from the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) submitted by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), 197,540 children have been involved in online gambling practices including approximately 80,000 children under the age of 10. At the local level, findings from the Teachers' Union in Demak Regency indicate that 2,000 students, from elementary to high school, have been exposed to online games containing gambling content, resulting in mental health problems, declining academic performance, and inappropriate use of pocket money. Even in urban areas like Jakarta, PPATK data shows that 1,836 children up to the age of 17 are involved in online gambling activities, with total transactions reaching IDR 2.29 billion. These facts illustrate that the negative impact of online gambling on families and children is not merely a hypothesis, but a reality that demands concrete intervention.

Although Indonesia has normatively enacted child protection regulations, their implementation continues to face significant challenges in addressing contemporary issues such as the impact of online gambling on family stability. Many legal frameworks were established without sufficient attention to the evolving dynamics of the digital family, resulting in inadequate recognition of how digital activities contribute to child neglect (Islami, 2024). The integration of family and digital spaces introduces new vulnerabilities that have not yet been thoroughly explored in child protection policy analyses (Lafton et al., 2022; Hakim et al., 2023). In such contexts, the state remains insufficiently present as a protector of children's rights, particularly when family disruption stems from legally ambiguous digital behaviors, which are hard to detect and often transnational in nature (Islami, 2024; ANTARA News, 2025). Consequently, children find themselves in a legally ambiguous situation where protection is often reactive triggered only after harm occurs and lacks a comprehensive, proactive monitoring mechanism (Lafton et al., 2022; Islami, 2024).

On the other hand, the complexity of this problem is compounded by the disproportionate attention in public policy toward online gambling-related family breakdowns compared to other social issues. Policy discourse often prioritizes criminal prosecution and asset confiscation, neglecting the critical dimension of child protection within disrupted family environments (Wardle et al., 2024; Livingstone &

Rintoul, 2023). Children residing in households rendered dysfunctional by online gambling constitute a vulnerable population, risking the perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of harm, including impaired emotional development and social instability (Wardle et al., 2024; Hing et al., 2022). Moreover, the absence of an intersectional approach integrating perspectives on family dynamics, digitalization, and legal child protection has left many affected areas beyond the reach of legal and social policy interventions (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Browne et al., 2023). This regulatory gap underscores the urgent need for anticipatory measures to address emerging forms of indirect violence against children in the digital era (Hing et al., 2022; Livingstone & Rintoul, 2023).

In reality, not all regions in Indonesia possess adequate institutional capacity or expertise to manage cases of family disintegration triggered by online gambling. Many jurisdictions, particularly densely populated urban centers and rapidly developing suburban areas, lack early detection mechanisms to identify patterns of family relationship deterioration driven by digital activities (Fauzi et al., 2025; O'Mullan et al., 2022). The absence of responsive complaint centers, limited inter-agency coordination between child welfare and family support services, and insufficient integration of children's perspectives into digital case management exacerbate the situation (El-Asam et al., 2021; Browne et al., 2023). With accelerating digitalization, these areas have become increasingly vulnerable, yet remain overlooked in national policy design, which often prioritizes punitive responses rather than preventive, family-centered strategies (O'Mullan et al., 2022; Hing et al., 2022). As a result, child protection is frequently treated as a remedial measure after harm has occurred rather than as part of a proactive prevention framework rooted in digitally healthy and protected family systems (El-Asam et al., 2021; Browne et al., 2023).

The absence of a comparative analysis of the relationship between family disintegration due to online gambling and the effectiveness of child protection regulations in the digital era is a challenge in itself. Most research and policies are still focused on the economic or criminal aspects of online gambling, while its structural impact on families and its consequences for children are often seen as secondary side effects. In fact, in the context of digital families, the relationship between online activities, parenting patterns, and the sustainability of family functions are interconnected in a complex and systematic way. Therefore, it is urgent to present a legal framework that is not only able to prosecute violations but also actively build a protection system that recognizes new forms of child vulnerability in families exposed to damage caused by online gambling. This article attempts to reread this relationship, explore existing regulatory gaps, and juxtapose social facts about the disintegration of digital families with the direction and achievements of child protection in Indonesia, which are often normative but not yet responsive to the new realities that are developing.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Online Gambling

Gambling is a game using money or valuables as a bet (such as playing dice, or cards). While online gambling itself is a gambling game via electronic media with internet access as an intermediary. Article 303 paragraph (3) of the Criminal Code explains that "what is referred to as a gambler is every game, where in general the possibility of getting profit depends solely on luck, also because the game is more trained or more skilled. This includes all regulations regarding decisions on competitions or other games that are not held between those who compete to play, as well as all other regulations" (Zalot, 2023).

Online gambling is an illegal act that is regulated in Article 27 paragraph 2 of Law Number 19 of 2016 amending Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning the Electronic Information Law. Online gambling games can also cause personal computer crimes commonly referred to as (cyber-crime). Cybercrime is a crime committed using a personal computer or smartphone as the main criminal sense (Fissel & Lee, 2023).

Online gambling is a kind of addiction, where initially just trying and getting a win will spur the desire or desire to repeat it with bigger and bigger bets with the thought that the more money is bet, the more wins will get. Online gambling itself can be done anywhere and anytime as long as the online gambler has a lot of free time, some money is used as a bet in the perpetrator's savings account, and the computer or smartphone and internet connection used are included as tools for online gambling (Trisnandi & Ulfatun, 2024).

2. Protection of Children

Protection is something that includes activities that are direct and indirect from actions that endanger children physically or psychologically. According to Wiyono, protection is a form of service that must be carried out by law enforcement officers or security officers to provide a sense of security, both physically and mentally (Bürgin et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the definition of child protection based on Article 1 number 2 of Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, "Child Protection is all activities to guarantee and protect children and their rights so that they can live, grow, develop, and participate, optimally following human dignity and dignity, and receive protection from violence and discrimination" (Alifiyah & Anshori, 2023).

Arif Gosita thinks that child protection is an effort to protect children to be able to exercise their rights and obligations. The protection of children's rights is essentially directly related to the regulations in laws and regulations. Policies, efforts, and activities that guarantee the realization of the protection of children's rights are first and foremost based on the consideration that children are a vulnerable and dependent group, in addition to the existence of groups of children who experience obstacles in their growth and development, both spiritually, physically and socially (Tisdall & Morrison, 2023).

Child protection is any effort made to create conditions so that every child can exercise their rights and obligations for the development and growth of children in a

natural way, both physically, mentally, and socially. Child protection is a manifestation of justice in a society, thus child protection is attempted in various areas of national and social life. Child protection activities have legal consequences, both concerning written and unwritten laws. Law is a guarantee for child protection activities (Aprilianda et al., 2022). Arif Gosita stated that legal certainty needs to be attempted for the sake of the continuity of child protection activities and to prevent abuses that have negative consequences that are not desired in the implementation of child protection. Child protection is implemented rationally, responsibly, and beneficially, reflecting an effective and efficient effort. Child protection efforts must not result in the death of initiative, creativity, and other things that cause dependence on others and uncontrolled behavior so that children do not have the ability and willingness to use their rights and carry out their obligations (Suseno et al., 2025).

Normatively, Indonesia already has various legal instruments aimed at protecting children, including Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, which regulates children's rights to survival, growth and development, protection from violence, and discrimination. Furthermore, Law No. 11 of 2008 in conjunction with Law No. 19 of 2016 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) prohibits the distribution and access to online gambling content, although it does not specifically regulate its impact on children within the family context. Article 303 of the Criminal Code also criminalizes gambling practices, including online gambling. However, a mapping of these regulations shows that the approach used remains fragmented and sectoral. There is no single regulation that comprehensively links illegal digital activities such as online gambling with structural damage within the family and its implications for children as subjects of protection. Even Government Regulation No. 78 of 2021 concerning Special Protection for Children does not explicitly include family disintegration due to digital practices as part of the special protection risks. This indicates the need for an evaluation of the applicable legal framework to be able to respond to the complex challenges of the digital era.

C. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research and content analysis methods, drawing on various sources such as laws (e.g., Law No. 35 of 2014, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, the Criminal Code), scientific journals on child protection and digital crime, and reports from institutions such as the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), and the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK). Thematic analysis techniques were used to identify patterns of regulatory inequality and weaknesses in child protection in the context of digital families impacted by online gambling practices. The researcher developed key themes such as "policy fragmentation," "the absence of digital family monitoring mechanisms," and "children's vulnerability in the virtual domestic space." The analytical framework refers to the child protection policy gap analysis model to assess the gap between legal norms and implementation, as well as the socio-legal

approach used to understand the interaction between legal structures, family social practices, and the development of digital technology in Indonesian society. With this approach, this study seeks not only to describe legal norms but also to explore the extent to which the law is present or absent in addressing the challenges digital families face due to online gambling (Safarudin et al., 2023).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Fragmentation of Family Relations in an Unmonitored Digital Ecosystem

In recent years, the digital ecosystem has taken a dominant role in reshaping the way humans live their daily lives, including in the most intimate sphere, namely the family. The dynamics created in digital households have undergone significant changes, especially in the aspect of communication between family members. The increasingly massive use of digital devices and unlimited online connectivity have replaced many moments of direct interaction between parents and children, as well as between other family members. The togetherness that used to be built through face-to-face conversations, shared activities, or family routines has now shifted to a fragmented connection through screens and applications. Communication that was originally dialogic and emotional is increasingly replaced by practical, cursory communication, and often only occurs one way. In households that are filled with limitless and uncontrolled online activities, a relationship gap arises that is not only spatial but also emotional. When communication loses its quality of closeness, the bonds within the family begin to slowly unravel.

This transformation becomes increasingly troubling when viewed alongside the rising instances of parental participation in online gambling. Such behavior not only consumes significant time and emotional investment but also profoundly undermines the quality of parenting. Parents, once the primary protectors and moral architects for their children, are now often overtaken by compulsive gambling drives (Barrera-Algarin & Vázquez-Fernández, 2021). Research indicates that behavioral addictions including online gambling and gaming are recognized as mental disorders in both DSM-5 and ICD-11, highlighting their substantial psychological impact on individuals and their families (Council of Europe Expert Group, 2024). In many cases, parental gambling leads to social isolation within the household: parents appear physically present but are mentally and emotionally absent neglect that is nearly impossible to detect due to its occurrence within private, digital spaces (Clark et al., 2024; Gupta & Derevensky, 2014). Consequently, children in these environments are deprived of a dependable caregiver, consistent guidance, and a nurturing emotional foundation (Dowling et al., 2022).

The absence of an effective parenting role creates a deeper emotional disconnect in family life. Interactions that should contain elements of empathy, affection, and closeness are now replaced by mechanical and indifferent routines. Children grow up in a social space filled with uncertainty, where their needs for warmth, guidance, and recognition are not met properly. In this situation, the family loses its function as the main institution that provides a sense of security and comfort.

Children who live under the shadow of parents who are trapped in the circle of online gambling not only lose physical protection but also emotional integrity and identity. The home that should be a place of refuge has instead turned into a source of anxiety and mental stress. The domestic environment loses its meaning as a safe space because it is polluted by conflict, tension, and instability that arise from destructive online activities.

This condition is exacerbated by the absence of community-based social interventions that are able to reach families that are experiencing silent disintegration. Social structures at the local level that have so far been a fortress in monitoring the condition of residents are now also facing major challenges due to the weakening of communal interactions. Families in trouble, especially those exposed to online gambling, are often isolated and undetected because the damage occurs in the invisible digital space (Killaspy et al., 2022). The absence of an active and community-based social assistance system causes many families to fall into structural collapse without ever receiving support or early warning. This situation shows that conventional social mechanisms are no longer adequate to deal with the shift in risk caused by digitalization in households. The necessary social interventions must be able to touch the private side of the family without violating the boundaries of autonomy but be adaptive enough to reach the new dynamics of domestic life that has been intensively connected to the virtual world.

In the Indonesian context, the impact of family disintegration due to online gambling practices can be clearly seen in various regions. One concrete example occurs in Tolouwi Village, Bima Regency, where online lottery gambling has had a serious impact on family stability. Research shows that many heads of families divert their income to lottery gambling, neglecting their children's basic needs such as education, health care, and nutrition. This situation results in domestic conflict, domestic violence, and cases of children dropping out of school. Socially, children in such environments experience a significantly reduced quality of life and lose emotional support from parents who are psychologically distracted by digital addiction (Irfan et al., 2024).

A similar phenomenon is also found in Bekasi Regency, particularly North Cikarang District, where online gambling is a major factor in the rising divorce rate. Qualitative research on several married couples shows that the involvement of one partner in online gambling practices creates serious financial instability and fosters prolonged conflict within the household. When parenting roles are disrupted and the emotional stability of the family collapses, children become the hidden victims of the fracturing relationship. Not only do they lose a consistent caregiver, but they also have to navigate a life of emotional and economic uncertainty (Khoerunisa et al., 2024). These studies reinforce the argument that online gambling practices within the family are not only a violation of the law but also a source of structural damage that harms children's long-term development.

In the midst of all this, it is clear that the fragmentation of family relations that occurs in the digital ecosystem is not solely the result of individual negligence, but

also a reflection of the absence of a protective structure that is responsive to social and technological developments. Digital families facing internal challenges such as parental involvement in online gambling practices require a cross-sectoral approach that does not only rely on legal or moral instruments alone, but also systemic support that unites the roles of the state, community, and technology. Without comprehensive and coordinated intervention, the younger generation will continue to grow up in a fragile family environment, at risk of losing direction, values, and opportunities to develop healthily. Therefore, it is necessary to build collective awareness regarding the urgency of maintaining family cohesion amid an ever-expanding digital ecosystem, so that children as the nation's next generation do not become victims of invisible but very real fragmentation in their daily lives.

2. The Fragility of the Child Protection System against Indirect Threats of Family Disintegration

The child protection system in Indonesia currently still faces serious challenges in anticipating and responding to indirect forms of threats, especially those originating from family disintegration due to online gambling. This kind of threat is silent, occurs in domestic spaces that are not easily accessible by formal intervention and is often missed in early detection systems. Children who grow up in families with parents who are involved in online gambling practices are at risk of experiencing various forms of psychological and social harm but are often not recorded in the official protection system because they do not show visible signs of physical violence or violations of the law. When the state only relies on administrative data or reports that emerge after major events such as violence or neglect, thousands of children who live in conditions of emotional stress and structural instability in the family become a group that is not touched by any protection.

Moreover, policies designed to deal with online gambling are still oriented towards a repressive approach towards adult perpetrators, without considering the impacts that arise on children in the family circle. The focus of law enforcement and regulators tends to be limited to actions such as stopping access, arresting perpetrators, or blocking sites, without further efforts to trace how the perpetrator's family environment is affected by these actions. In many cases, when a father or mother is arrested for involvement in digital gambling, there is no follow-up mechanism to ensure that the children left behind remain in safe and adequate care (Hing et al., 2022). Policies that do not involve the child's perspective in the entire process cause protection to be lopsided and do not fully address the complexity of the problem. Children are positioned as passive objects whose existence is not considered in the policy chain, even though they bear a large psychological burden from the collapse of family stability.

Although child protection has become a national policy agenda, the reality on the ground shows that the existing system is unable to address the hidden impacts of online gambling practices within the family environment. According to a recent report from the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK), confirmed by

the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), at least 197,540 Indonesian children are involved in online gambling practices, including 80,000 children under the age of 10. This indicates lax digital access and the absence of effective domestic oversight. Furthermore, a case in Jakarta revealed that 1,836 children up to the age of 17 had engaged in online gambling transactions worth over Rp 2.29 billion, demonstrating the deep and systemic nature of this problem, which permeates the family sphere without formal detection. Unfortunately, there are no legal or social mechanisms to actively monitor children in such situations, as the protection system still relies on reports of physical or visible violence.

This condition is exacerbated by the absence of an integrative and cross-sectoral approach to dealing with issues that are at the intersection of the digital world, family dynamics, and child protection. Institutions that regulate communication and information affairs, agencies responsible for family welfare, and child protection institutions are still operating within their respective corridors of duty without effective coordination. As a result, an institutional vacuum has emerged where no single actor is truly responsible for children affected by the structural destruction of families due to online factors. Efforts to integrate a digital household-based child risk monitoring system have not been a main agenda, while the phenomenon of online gambling continues to grow rapidly and widely. When a sectoral approach still dominates, cross-disciplinary issues like this will always be left behind in policy responses and field handling.

Furthermore, existing regulations have not been fully able to capture the domino effect of family damage on child protection as a whole. Laws and derivative policies often view violations against children from a single perspective, namely when there is explicit violence, sexual exploitation, or visible physical neglect. The impact of family disintegration due to online gambling practices is much more complex and multi-layered. Children may attend school and appear physically healthy but suffer psychological damage from living in constant tension, conflict, and emotional turmoil. Without a broader reading of these new forms of vulnerability, legal protection systems will continue to fail to recognize and prevent harm that comes not in the form of physical violence, but through the decay of social relations that are invisible to conventional legal rules.

In such situations, the psychosocial dimension of children is frequently overlooked in risk assessment processes, which remain largely dependent on formal administrative data and incident reports. Currently, there are no mechanisms that genuinely explore the lived experiences of children from families affected by digital gambling practices (Oviedo-Trespalacios et al., 2023; Browne et al., 2023). Even institutions mandated to protect children tend to emphasize legal and physical dimensions of harm, while emotional and social aspects remain underprioritized in interventions (Dowling et al., 2022; Langham et al., 2016). For affected children, the experience of emotional abandonment, witnessing domestic conflicts driven by gambling-related financial pressures, or residing in chronically unstable environments exerts long-term negative effects on personality development and

future outcomes (Binde, 2022; Hing et al., 2022). When such vulnerabilities are absent from the core parameters of child protection policies, states risk fostering a generation growing under structural scars left by digitally driven family collapse (Dowling et al., 2022; Binde, 2022).

The fragility of the child protection system against indirect threats from family disintegration is not just a matter of legal weaknesses or budget constraints, but rather a perspective that has not fully changed to adapt to the challenges of the times. In a world that has changed drastically due to digitalization, children face threats that are not always physical or criminal but rather come from emotional collapse, neglect of care, and loss of security in their own homes. The protection system that is needed is one that is able to read the signs of damage that are not detected by official reports but are felt in the child's daily life. A holistic, adaptive, and integrated approach is needed that not only responds to violence that has already occurred but is also able to prevent damage that is still happening silently behind the walls of a home filled with uncontrolled online activity.

3. Inequality of Regulatory Response to Digital Dynamics in the Context of Childcare

The disparity in regulatory responses to digital dynamics in the context of childcare increasingly exposes fundamental weaknesses in the legal system and child protection policies in Indonesia. As digital transformation progresses rapidly and reaches almost all aspects of household life, the legal system is lagging behind in responding to these changes. The family space, which used to be closed and static, has now become a very open and dynamic space due to the almost limitless digital connectivity. Unfortunately, the existing regulatory system still relies on a traditional approach that views the family as a homogeneous, unchanging entity that is always in a stable condition. Changes in behavior, interactions, and relationships within the family due to technological penetration have not been followed by adequate regulatory updates. As a result, when serious problems arise such as parental involvement in online gambling, the legal system does not have the tools to understand and handle the broad impact of this phenomenon, especially on children living in families who are directly or indirectly affected.

The regulatory response to online gambling in Indonesia has largely focused on punitive measures targeting offenders, neglecting the family as a highly vulnerable social unit. Current policies primarily emphasize website blocking, network arrests, and financial tracking rather than integrating educational and household-based preventive strategies (Jang & Ko, 2023; Thomas et al., 2022). Yet many online gambling cases occur covertly within homes, often involving one or both parents and persisting for extended periods before discovery (Hing et al., 2022). During this time, children are exposed to altered parental behaviors, escalating family tensions, and deep emotional harm, while the state lacks mechanisms explicitly designed to shield children from such destructive processes (Russell et al., 2021; Browne et al., 2023). The absence of a preventive framework oriented toward digital family dynamics

highlights a persistent gap in public policy, which continues to conceptualize caregiving as a physical-domain issue rather than recognizing the integration of family life into digital spaces (Thomas et al., 2022; Hing et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the inability of the legal system to provide a special legal protection scheme for children living in families affected by online gambling further exacerbates the situation. Existing regulations have not recognized that there are new forms of vulnerability arising from illegal online practices carried out by family members themselves. There are no articles, protocols, or policies that explicitly respond to the conditions of children who are emotionally, psychologically, and even physically disturbed by the destructive digital behavior of their parents. Legal protection is still limited to cases of physical violence, sexual exploitation, or neglect in the formal sense, without reaching forms of vulnerability that are non-physical but very damaging to the balance of children's lives. The lack of attention to this situation indicates that the legal system has not truly entered into the logic of the digital family as a new social entity that brings different challenges than before.

This inequality is also exacerbated by the inconsistency between the child protection regulatory framework and the direction of the increasingly open and pro-market national digital economy policy. The government is actively encouraging digitalization in various sectors, including education, public services, and the household economy, but on the other hand, has not given commensurate attention to the risks arising from this openness. Child protection regulations are not strengthened in parallel to deal with the possibility that state-driven digital spaces can also be used for illegal activities such as online gambling. In other words, the state is pushing people into the digital space without providing sufficient protective fences, especially for vulnerable groups such as children. When households become the center of digital activity, any policy gaps that are unable to accommodate the potential risks within them will lead to the neglect of children's rights that should be protected by the state.

This situation becomes even more complex when because many areas in Indonesia, especially urban-marginal areas and rapidly developing suburban areas, are not covered by family digital literacy programs or online supervision. These areas are experiencing rapid growth in digital connectivity, but are not accompanied by an increase in the social and educational capacity of families to understand, manage, and protect themselves from the dangers of cyberspace. In many cases, parents do not even have basic knowledge about the long-term impacts of destructive digital activities, including gambling. Meanwhile, affirmative policies from the state to reach these families are still minimal, and sporadic, and have not been a priority for social development. The absence of the state in building family digital awareness makes children in these areas increasingly vulnerable to the risk of undetected family dysfunction.

From all of these realities, it is clear that the inequality of regulatory responses is not only dangerous because it creates legal loopholes, but also because it shows a lack of bias towards children as the most vulnerable party in social change due to digitalization. Childcare in the digital age can no longer be separated from the

architecture of technological and economic policies, and therefore existing regulations should be able to bridge the interests between digital growth and protection of affected groups. When the legal system fails to read the shift in values, structures, and patterns of life in digital families, children are left to grow up in open spaces but without protection, in homes that are connected but disoriented, and in a society that is technologically literate but blind to the wounds left by the absence of laws that side with their best interests.

4. Regulatory Gap Analysis

Although Indonesia has a relevant legal framework, analysis shows significant gaps in protecting children from digital family dynamics, particularly in the context of online gambling. First, the latest ITE Law (Law No. 1 of 2024) has added Article 16A paragraph (1), which requires Electronic System Providers (ESE) to provide protection for children who use or access their services. However, as of early 2025, the Draft Government Regulation (RPP) on Child Protection Governance in Electronic System Provision (TKPAPSE) which should be a technical derivative and operationalization of this article is still in the harmonization stage and has not been fully implemented. This means that ESE have not yet systematically established mechanisms such as age verification, access restrictions, or parental control features in applications (Fitri & Rahmadhani, 2024).

Second, Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection does regulate children's basic rights and prohibits violence, discrimination, and exploitation. However, this regulation does not include specific provisions to address the risks of family dysfunction caused by digital practices such as online gambling, let alone the role of technology in accelerating domestic disintegration. The lack of adaptation to the digital context has fragmented child protection, isolated from new threats based on the family's virtual space.

Third, although Government Regulation No. 17/2025 mandates that Educators (PSE) implement content classification, age verification, and control features, rather than simply content moderation, implementation in the field remains suboptimal. One obstacle is low digital literacy among both children and parents, as well as insufficient synergy between institutions (local governments, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), Komdigi, and platform providers) to ensure comprehensive policy implementation. Thus, the existing legal framework does have the potential for protection, but it has not yet reached the level of policy and implementation within digital families, especially in the context of latent threats such as online gambling.

5. Redesigning Child Protection in the Age of Vulnerable Digital Families

The urgency to redesign the child protection system is increasingly pressing as new forms of vulnerability emerge from unstable digital family structures. In the current situation, family breakdown due to the dynamics of cyberspace, including the involvement of one or both parents in online gambling practices, can no longer be considered a purely domestic issue but has become a social problem that requires

systematic legal and policy attention. Existing regulations have not been designed to recognize and anticipate forms of destruction that occur silently through digital space, even though their impact on child development is very significant. In this reality, the preparation of regulations that explicitly make the destruction of digital-based family structures one of the main threats to child protection is a basic need that cannot be postponed. These regulations must go beyond the formal approach that has so far been limited to physical violence and conventional exploitation, and begin to explore the gray areas that have so far been ignored, such as emotional neglect, social disconnection, and psychological instability that stem from destructive digital practices in the household.

To address this complex challenge, a redesign of child protection cannot be the sole responsibility of a single institution or sector. Instead, active and sustained multi-sector engagement is essential to establish a comprehensive recovery framework for children living in disrupted family environments. The legal, technology, education, mental health, and social service sectors must collaborate to build an approach that is not only responsive to violations but also capable of healing the psychological wounds and trauma these children endure (Stritzke et al., 2021; Breen et al., 2022). For children affected by family breakdown due to online gambling, for example, collaboration among child protection agencies, law enforcement bodies, rehabilitation service providers, and local community networks is critical in creating safe and sustainable spaces for recovery (Rintoul et al., 2023). Without a structured, integrated mechanism to address both psychosocial and economic impacts, children risk remaining trapped in cycles of neglect and deprivation, denied their fundamental rights to grow up in loving, stable, and supportive environments (Browne et al., 2023; Hing et al., 2022).

One very important but under-optimized approach in the current child protection system is local community-based intervention. Amidst the limited capacity of the state to reach all levels of society, local communities have a strategic position as the frontline in detecting symptoms of family dysfunction, responding to children's emergency needs, and building social support systems that are relevant to the local social and cultural context. By strengthening the capacity of local cadres, community leaders, and citizen-based organizations, the child protection system can become more adaptive to the rapidly changing realities of the digital era. Communities can be places where children feel safe to express problems, where families receive direct digital education, and where social interventions can be carried out before family breakdown reaches a crisis point. Unfortunately, until now, community models like this have rarely been used as the main basis for national policies, even though they are very effective in building a vibrant and participatory social protection network.

As part of the redesign of the child protection system, the risk indicators used to identify vulnerable conditions in children need to be substantially expanded. Currently, the indicators used are still very limited to administrative data such as economic status, education status, and history of physical violence. Meanwhile, exposure to destructive digital behavior in families such as the presence of gambling

content, access to illegal sites, and parents' digital dependency has not been included in the category of formally recognized risk variables. By including these factors, countries, and related institutions can begin to build an early warning system based on the realities of today's digital life. This will not only allow for faster and more targeted interventions but also legitimize forms of vulnerability that have been hidden and undefined in the old child protection framework. In this context, expanding indicators is not merely technical, but reflects a paradigm shift in understanding children as subjects living in a digital environment that is both full of potential and full of risk.

All of these efforts must ultimately lead to the establishment of a family-based monitoring system supported by inclusive technology and in the best interests of children. Technology, which has often been a trigger for damage to family relationships, needs to be reclaimed and converted into a tool for protection. This monitoring system does not have to be repressive but can be built as a digital ecosystem that facilitates positive monitoring, strengthening family relationships, and child-friendly reporting. Family education applications, household internet usage tracking tools, and easily accessible digital complaint platforms can be part of a new, more adaptive protection infrastructure. Most importantly, this technology must be developed with an inclusive approach, paying attention to groups with less access, and ensuring that every child has a safe channel to voice their experiences when experiencing pressure or digital domestic violence. In this way, child protection is not only a state agenda, but also a shared responsibility between society, technology, and the family system itself in creating a safer and more humane future for every child.

E. CONCLUSION

Family disintegration due to online gambling is a phenomenon that can no longer be viewed as an individual problem, but rather as a complex social symptom that directly touches on aspects of child protection in the digital era. Fragmentation of relationships within the family, weak early detection of the conditions of affected children, and regulatory inequality in responding to the dynamics of domestic spaces that have been connected to cyberspace show that the existing legal and policy systems have not been able to adapt to changing times. Children become hidden victims of structural damage that originates from illegal online activities carried out in the private space of the family, without any preventive intervention or adequate protection system. For this reason, a redesign of child protection is needed that not only improves the existing legal framework but also builds an intersectoral, community-based approach supported by inclusive technology. The future child protection system must be able to recognize new forms of vulnerability that arise from destructive digital practices in households and integrate legal, social, and digital instruments into a single policy that is responsive and pro-child. In this way, protection for children in the era of vulnerable digital families can be realized more comprehensively and sustainably.

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